ALERT

News from the UFMCC
on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.

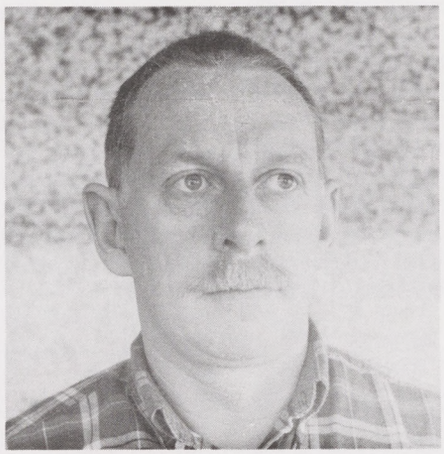
July 1995

MCC Sydney Offers Practical Spiritual Support

The HIV/AIDS ministry of MCC Sydney and their pastor, Rev. Greg Smith, District Coordinator of Australia, was featured in a recent issue of the magazine "Campaign". While Rev. Smith and his pastoral care team do a great deal of counseling with people with HIV/AIDS, and offer a spiritual support group, MCC Sydney also offers practical assistance to help fulfill basic needs for people with HIV infection.

Smith feels that MCC fills in the gaps between HIV/AIDS agencies and bureaucracies. MCC Sydney runs the Manna Project which "provides food parcels for PWA's who from time to time find it hard to made ends meet." The church also provides "set-up parcels for people who are moving into houses." It provides them with lots of basics that they need to get started: perishables, soap, coffee, (even) a smaller parcel which is a four day supply of non-perishable food." The church may give out $700 in food in less than four weeks.

MCC Sydney's AIDS Ministry also offers "for want of a better word, 'welfare projects' which provide basic household furniture and items for people -- crockery, cutlery, sheets, linen, doonas, pillows -- all the basics to set someone up as they're moving into a Housing Commission or other Department of Housing funded accomodation."



Rev. Greg Smith

Smith sees a particular need among "younger guys," HIV-positive teenagers. The church helps them to get off the streets, and motivates them to care for themselves. "We can...give them that bit of incentive to look after themselves and show them that there are some groups that care enough for them to empower them to do something for themselves. That is all funded through our opportunity shop called the Out of the Closet Emporium. We receive donations from the community for anything, goods and cash, anything from beds to clothes. We take it with a guarantee to the donor that it would be used for people with HIV/AIDS, their carers and friends."

Another ministry in the Sydney church is a weekly Sunday luncheon "for PWA's and their carers, and that's become very successful. We've been doing it for about two years now. We do that in conjunction with help from other groups...Some groups will put on a drag show or bingo."

Noting that the church has historically not been very good at helping young people face death and grief, Smith talks passionately about the importance of funerals and burial services as a primary ministry of the church. "It's not a place to use mumbo-jumbo and religious gobbledegook to confuse people. It should be the place where we really get to say who our friends are, who our lovers were, and what our community's done." These services provide opportunity as well to ease the pain, grief, and guilt of loss.

(see MCC Sydney, page 2)

New HIV Prevention Program from UFMCC AIDS Ministry

UFMCC AIDS Ministry is pleased to announce a new HIV prevention program targeting young gay men, ages 18-25: the "Peer Education Program of the Metropolitan Community Churches," or PEP/MCC.

Every local MCC will be sent an inspiring video about the program, and a Training Manual for Peer Educators with a special appendix for Trainers. With these resources, each local church can establish a Peer Education Program for HIV prevention. PEP/MCC is based on the highly successful PEP/LA, founded and directed by Wendy Arnold, M.P.H. PEP/LA and Ms. Arnold have already established PEP's in 8 countries beyond the U.S., including Russia, Hungary, and Thailand, which shows that the program is culturally adaptable.

The video has been produced and directed by Alison Arngrim. The video is hosted by Ms. Arngrim, and features Rev. Elder Troy Perry, Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, and interviews with a number of young gay men, lesbians, and straight youths who are involved in PEP/LA. The video was shot and edited by Joseph Conarkov, who has worked on projects such as the film, *True Lies*, MTV and Nickelodeon "spots", and video programs for the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired.

The manuals have been adapted and revised by Bob Schoonover and Rev. Steve Pieters from the Southern California AIDS Hotline Training manual, and the PEP/LA training manual. Schoonover is the founding director of the Southern

(see New HIV Program, page 2)

"Protect The Blood!" Campaign

The Umoja Sasa (U.S.) Prevention Marketing Group, the country's leading prevention marketing organization targeting under-served ethnic/minority communities, has announced the "Protect The Blood!" Campaign, a culturally sensitive HIV/AIDS prevention/education program. Umoja Sasa is Swahili for "Unity Now!"

The goal of "Protect The Blood!" is to make the program the rallying cry for the fight against HIV/AIDS in the African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American communities. The campaign emphasizes the need through frightening statistics: in the U.S. most of the women with AIDS are African-American. The majority of the babies with AIDS in the U.S. are African-American. The fastest growing group of teenagers with AIDS is African-American. In 1994, the second-fastest growing population of men with AIDS in the U.S. is African- American.

African-Americans account for 12% of the U.S. population, but according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control in 1994, African-Americans represent 32.5% of all persons with HIV/AIDS, and 37.6% of new cases in the last year.

Churches as well as local service organizations are encouraged to include this prevention marketing program in their budget for education and prevention. Prevention marketing is one of the few weapons available in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The "Protect The Blood!" Campaign contains the following materials: Educational Matchbook Style Condoms (containing educational messages), educational brochures, videotapes, posters, T-shirts, sweatshirts, buttons, door hangers, and bumper stickers.

For more information, call 800-99-UMOJA, or fax (410) 625-1306. The address of the Umoja Sasa Prevention Marketing Group is P.O. Box 41401, Baltimore, MD 21203-6401. ▼

New HIV Program...

(continued from page 1)

California AIDS Hotline, and is currently the director of the Spanish AIDS Hotline in Los Angeles. The entire project has been supervised and coordinated by Rev. Steve Pieters.

Local MCC's will receive the video and manual before General Conference. During General Conference, there will be a workshop to provide further training. Wendy Arnold, Alison Arngrim, Bob Schoonover and Rev. Pieters will be available during the conference for consultation. Ms. Arnold will be available by phone through the rest of the year, for those who need further assistance in establishing their PEP/MCC.

Rev. Elder Troy Perry states in the video, "I want every MCC to have a peer training program...If we're going to double our size by the year 2001, we've got to stop the dying... The only effective vaccine against HIV is education."

This project is being funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, through the U.S. AIDS National Interfaith Network. ▼

ALERT is a Quarterly Publication

Readers are reminded that ALERT has become a quarterly newsletter, appearing in January, April, July, and October. During other months, there is a column on "HIV/AIDS Concerns" published in the UFMCC publication, "Keeping in Touch."

The ALERT newsletter contains information on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment. The Editor is Rev. Dr. A. Stephen Pieters.

For more information or to send a donation, please write: ALERT, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., #304, Los Angeles, CA 90029.

PEP/MCC Package Available For Sale

Every local Metropolitan Community Church will receive the PEP/MCC video and training manual free of charge. However, the video and training manual for the Peer Education Project of the Metropolitan Community Churches (PEP/MCC) is being made available for sale to other churches, organizations, and individuals. The complete package costs U.S. $35, plus postage and handling. Anyone wishing to order the package, including the video, the peer educators' training manual, and the trainers' supplement, should write to: UFMCC Resource Center, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., #304, Los Angeles, CA 90029.

MCC Sydney...

(continued from page 1)

During Leather Pride Week, Rev. Smith held a memorial service where most everyone, including Rev. Smith, were in "leather and bondage gear." It is one more way in which MCC's HIV/AIDS Ministry supports and affirms the diversity of lesbians and gay men of Sydney as they continue to suffer multiple losses. Fifteen years into the pandemic, it is perhaps not remarkable that Rev. Smith states, "Burying people, we're much better at than anyone else in that we truly believe that the funeral service should be a celebration of the person's life." ▼

Medical Update

Presented by Mark Katz, MD, and reported by Jim Stoecker

[reprinted with permission from the Being Alive Newsletter, June 1995.]

Survival After CD4 Count Falls Below 200

A recent report in the journal *AIDS* (February 1995) evaluated 579 men in the MACS study after their CD4 count dropped below 200. The subset studied were followed for three years after their initial drop in CD4 count.

Researchers found that 20% of the group did not have an AIDS-defining condition at the end of the three years. Some 28% of the men received an AIDS diagnosis within one year of the study, and 29% within two to three years. The rest of the group already had an AIDS-defining condition at the start of the study period.

Researchers noted that correlated with a longer time to an AIDS-defining condition were slower declining CD4 count, higher body mass index, and lower incidence of thrush. On the other hand, they found no correlation between disease progression and use of tobacco or alcohol or a history of sexually transmitted diseases. And interestingly, they found that 45% of the men who remained AIDS-free used neither prophylaxis for opportunistic infections nor antivirals.

It should be noted that the researchers took their data from the earlier years of the MACS study (which began collecting data in 1984). If we looked at the data today, one suspects that we would see a different distribution than reported in this article and that a larger percentage would be without an AIDS-defining condition.

Stress as a Cofactor for Disease Progression

What makes one person advance quickly to an AIDS-defining condition while another person remains asymptomatic for years? What are the cofactors for HIV disease progression? We know that age, viral strains, and genetic factors are important considerations. Common wisdom has said that stress might also be a cofactor, but there has not been any proof of this.

Now we read a study in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* (April 1995) that appears to offer some proof about the effects of stress on a person with HIV. In this study, 99 HIV+ men without symptoms were compared to 65 seronegative men. In order to measure stress, the researchers used a standardized test that identifies 111 so-called "stressors." Each person in the study was rated on each stressor on a scale of zero to four. Interviews were given over a period of time; at the end of the study, each participant received an overall stress rating.

Not surprisingly, researchers found that the seropositive group had a much higher stress rating overall than the seronegative group. (We perhaps did not need a study to know this.) What is important is that they also found that those with higher stress ratings had statistically significant reductions in NK (natural killer) cells. This is the most objective data that we have to date that stress does have an effect on T-Cell function.

Some News on Antivirals

Two drugs can be additive (each brings their own efficacy), synergistic (together they raise the efficacy of each alone), or antagonistic (efficacy is reduced). In combination antiviral

(see Medical Update, page 4)

AIDS and Addiction Videos

A trilogy of 15-minute videos on AIDS and addiction are being distributed by the University of Wisconsin in Green Bay. The videos are designed to be used in treatment or support group settings with IV drug users, sex workers, and persons living with HIV/AIDS. Made with the help of recovering addicts and those who are HIV infected, the videos' premise is that addicts will more willingly listen to those who have been there than to doctors and other health professionals.

The interviews are candid, real, and poignant. These videos can also be valuable for use in AIDS testing sites, homeless shelters, and by AIDS outreach workers who can reach the people on the street.

The three videos are:

Up A New Rope: A Talk about AIDS and Recovery.

Up A New Rope powerfully portrays the connection between IV drug use and AIDS through concrete and candid delivery of the information by recovering drug users, outreach workers and others who work closely with the addicted. The program cautions against high risk behavior, demonstrates methods of protection and encourages viewers to reach out towards recovery.

Haven

Haven takes the viewer through the depths and the steps that are needed to seek recovery from drug addiction. Those who have been there recount their journey from addiction through treatment to recovery and offer help and support to others in getting undercover and into treatment.

Fritz, Deb and Dennis: Living With AIDS

Fritz, Deb, and Dennis are former drug users who contracted HIV infection through unclean needles. They "tell it like it is" about the importance of maintaining good nutrition, a healthy lifestyle and relationships with lovers, friends and family while living with AIDS.

For more information on ordering the videos, please call (800) 633-7445. ▼

Viral Load Predicts AIDS Progression

By John S. James

(reprinted with permission from AIDS Treatment News, #125, June 16, 1995)

A prospective study of 62 patients found that viral load was the best marker available for predicting who would progress to AIDS:

*Those who had a viral load of over 100,000 copies per ml on their first measurement after seroconversion were more than ten times as likely to develop AIDS as those who did not, during the follow-up time of this study (median somewhat under five years).

*Blood samples from the 62 patients were saved at six-month intervals; the viral load test was later run on some of the samples obtained. Of those who had no samples over 10,000 copies in the first two years after seroconversion, the proportion developing AIDS was 6% of those whose CD4 count was under 500, zero for those over 500. But of those who had one or more sample over 10,000 copies in the first two years after seroconversion, 86% of those with CD4 under 500 developed AIDS - as did 45% of those with CD4 over 500.

(see Viral Load..., page 4)

Medical Issues Lymphoma: New TAG Report

[reprinted with permission from AIDS Treatment News, #224, 6/2/95]

The Treatment Action Group (TAG) has published a 64-page booklet on the current status of AIDS-related lymphoma. *The Lymphoma Project Report: Current Issues in Research and Treatment of AIDS-Associated Lymphoma*, by Michael Marco, with an introduction by Lawrence D. Kaplan, M.D., is based on interviews with dozens of experts.

Lymphoma, of which there are several kinds, is a cancer of the lymphatic system which occurs in HIV-negative as well as HIV-positive persons, it is much more common in persons with immune deficiency (whether caused by HIV, by drugs to prevent rejection of organ transplants, or by other causes) than in the general population. Lymphoma occurs in about five to ten percent of person with HIV, often after AIDS has been diagnosed (although it is the first AIDS-defining illness in about three percent of persons with AIDS). While it can occur at any CD4 count, the risk is greater when the count is low. However, the length of time one is HIV infected may be a more important risk factor than the degree of immune suppression; for this reason, the number of cases of lymphoma is increasing since people with HIV are now living longer than before. Unlike Kaposi's sarcoma, which occurs mainly in gay men, lymphoma occurs about equally in all HIV risk groups; for unknown reasons, white men are at a slightly higher risk than others.

Sometimes lymphoma is found in a single rapidly-swelling lymph node; in other cases there is no specific sign, and the disease is difficult to diagnose.

Lymphoma can be cured in many cases, with chemotherapy, radiation, or other treatments. But it still remains a major life-threatening condition, with many people living less than a year after diagnosis.

The TAG booklet, first released May 1995 at the 31st Annual Meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, looks at all aspects of AIDS-related lymphoma, including conventional and experimental treatments. It includes 23 recommendations, mainly for improving future research. The writing is fairly technical, about at a medical student reading level.

The Lymphoma Project Report is available for U.S. $10 from Treatment Action Group, 200 East 10th Street, #601, New York, NY 10003. It is available free of charge to people living with HIV disease who cannot afford to pay: call TAG at (212) 873-9044. ▼

Hope: The 1995 U.S. National Skills Building Conference

Hope is the theme of the 1995 U.S. National Skills Building Conference. The conference is the only national, award-winning management training conference exclusively designed to enhance the effectiveness of front-line workers in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The conference this year will be held October 19-22, 1995, at the Century Plaza Hotel and Tower in Los Angeles, CA. It is co-sponsored once again by the AIDS National Interfaith Network, the National Minority AIDS Council, and the National Association of People with AIDS, all U.S. based organizations. The conference last year, in Atlanta, attracted more than 1800 AIDS workers and people living with HIV/AIDS from all over the world.

This year's conference theme, HOPE, strikes a universal chord in all people working in the AIDS movement. While many of us disagree about many things at any given time, we can all agree with certainty that within each of us lives hope. It cannot be disputed that we all hope for a cure, pray for the strength to carry on, and we hope to never forget all those who have gone before.

Members of the Metropolitan Community Churches have been, and will continue to be, key players in planning, teaching, and attending the National Skills Building Conference. Instead of a UFMCC AIDS Ministry Conference, members of MCC are encouraged to attend this conference which provides far greater opportunities for learning, growing and networking.

For more information contact the National Skills Building Conference office at 1931 13th St., NW, Washington, DC 20009-4432; phone (202) 483-1124; fax (202) 483-1127. ▼

Viral Load...

(continued from page 3)

These findings, from the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (MACS) were published by Mellors JW, Kingsley LA, Rinaldo CR, and others, "Quantitation of HIV-1 RNA in Plasma Predicts Outcome after Seroconversion," Annals of Internal Medicine, April 15, 1995; volume 122, pages 573-579. The research was funded in part by the U.S. National Institutes of Health. ▼

Medical Update...

(continued from page 3)

therapy, we want to avoid antagonistic drugs and search for synergistic combinations. In a study reported at the recent Conference on Antiviral Research in Santa Fe, researchers reported synergy in a combination of AZT and a protease inhibitor. This was, however, a test tube study, but it does offer hope that once protease inhibitors become available, we may have a powerful combination to fight HIV.

On the down side, it was reported that when resistance develops to this protease inhibitor, viral strains can develop that are resistant to all protease inhibitors.

At the same conference, Burroughs-Wellcome reported on early studies of its latest antiviral, 935U83. After 24 weeks of study, no resistance has developed and side effects are less than what we have seen with earlier antivirals. Researchers also report that in the test tube the drug remains active against viral strains resistant to AZT, ddI, and ddC. We should be hearing more about this new antiviral as testing continues.

SPV-30: Made in France and Testing in the U.S.

We have news of a new drug called SPV-30 that is an extract from the boxwood tree. This drug is made in France and a phase I trial there showed an average CD4 count rise of 100 for those on the drug and a drop of 50 for those on placebo. Noted French AIDS researcher Luc Montagnier is very interested in this particular drug and is planning more trials. You can get a free six month supply of the drug in return for providing regular blood work results to the researchers. For information on this study, call David Stokes in Boston at (617) 424-9195. ▼